DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 134 219 IR 004 417

AUTHOR Polito, Ronald
TITLE An Overview of Media Education: Its Objectives and Evolution.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiovisual Communication; *Audiovisual Instruction; Film Study; Mass Media; Nonverbal Communication; *Visual Learning; Visual Literacy

ABSTRACT

Media education, evolved from film study, screen education, and visual literacy, is concerned with expanding learners' capability in nonprint communication, especially in the areas of film, still photography and television. Its objectives are to assist learners to interpret and utilize the mass media they encounter, and to foster individual development. The development of media education, traced back to 1900, indicates that it is receiving increasingly greater support and has become a vital educational concern. (SC)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED134219

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

AN OVERVIEW OF MEDIA EDUCATION:

ITS OBJECTIVES AND EVOLUTION

BY

Ronald Polito

1975

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ronald Polito

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

IR004417

AN OVERVIEW OF MEDIA EDUCATION: ITS OBJECTIVES AND EVOLUTION

Ronald Polito
1975

As our society relies more and more on the nonprint modes of communication (film, television, audio recordings, etc.), educators have become increasingly concerned about the child's ability to interpret and use these modes effectively. Unfortunately, a wide discrepancy exists between the many vehicles of communication available to the total society and those few vehicles attended to by formal education. In the past fifteen years attempts to integrate the study of these nonprint media into the child's formal education have centered around the concept of media education.

THE SCOPE OF MEDIA EDUCATION

The term "media education" evolved from an earlier term "screen education" when many educators in the middle 1960s felt that the word "screen" limited their concern to film and television. The term "screen education" was coined in the late 1950s in Britain to expand on an older term and concept "film study."[1] The origins of "film study" go back to the early 1900s, and it remains today

---

[1]Interview with A. W. Hodgkinson, founder member of the British Society for Education in Film and Television, Worcester, Massachusetts, May 14, 1973.

an important area of educational concern, particularly at the secondary and college levels.[2]

Despite the limiting connotations of the term "screen education" it has not been entirely replaced by the term "media education." "Screen education" is widely used internationally and in many parts of the United States. Its practitioners, however, have not limited themselves exclusively to the study of film and television. The study of other nonprint media such as audio recordings, still photographs, and graphics is also considered important.[3]

A third term "visual literacy" is sometimes used in place of "screen" or "media education." In a strict sense, visual literacy is distinct, both in focus and direction, but all three concepts support the same main concern, i.e., that our traditional regard for aiding each individual to develop his maximum capability in written and spoken communication be expanded to include the variety of nonprint communication vehicles available for use today.

Relationship of Education to the Nonprint Media

The concept of media education is well established in

---

[2]Stuart Selby, "The Study of Film as an Art Form in American Secondary Schools" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963), pp. 51-53, 161-167.

[3]New England Screen Education Association, Articles of Organization, filed with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1973, p. 4.

Europe, Great Britain, Australia, and even New Zealand. International concern is reflected in the reports of several international symposia on media education, one of the most important being the International Meeting on Film and Television Study held at Oslo, Norway in 1962. The report of this meeting, written by A. W. Hodgkinson and published by UNESCO, represents one of the earliest attempts to explore formally the relationship of education to the nonprint media. The report states:

> We are now in a position to define "screen education", not as "teaching films and television to children", but as "teaching children, in relation to the screen". Note the comma. Our prime task is to teach children and we choose to do this by placing special emphasis on the screen, in the belief that here we have a major means of communication comparable to those of speech, writing, picture making, acting, etc. . . .[4]

Relationship of Media Education to Audio-Visual Education

The above definition raises the question of media education's relationship to audio-visual education. In this writer's view the only real difference between the two is that most contemporary audio-visual education focuses on training an individual to utilize efficiently the nonprint media for communication, while media education gives equal if not greater importance to developing

---

[4] A. W. Hodgkinson, Screen Education: Teaching a Critical Approach to Cinema and Television, UNESCO Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, #42 (Paris: UNESCO, 1964), p. 21.

the critical and interpretative skills of the individuals receiving the communication. At present, audio-visual education relies largely upon specifically produced instructional materials and practitioners often describe their objectives in behavioral terms, while media educators rely largely on the commercial mass media and often describe their objectives in expressive terms.[5] This apparent conflict in approach results from these two areas of study approaching the complex nature of nonprint communication from different perspectives. As more is learned about nonprint media and human communication, one should be able to observe a narrowing of the present, albeit artificial differences that often separate "audio-visual" and "media" educators.

---

[5]Richard Lacey, in his book, Seeing With Feeling: Film in the Classroom (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1972), pp. 88-91, argues that notwithstanding the contribution of the behavioral approach it must be balanced with humanistic objectives. Behavioral objectives are ". . . an exclusively rational approach which ignores covert, experimental, unmeasurable aspects of life and hence neglects significant aspects of personal meaning. . . . By contrast, an expressive objective does not specify what behavior the student is to acquire but instead describes an educational encounter. An expressive objective identifies the situation in which the students are to work, the problem they are to confront, and the task they are to perform, but not what they are to learn. . . . the products of their learning are as diverse as the learners themselves, and the task is not to apply a common standard, but to reflect on what has been produced or shared, to illuminate its uniqueness and significance."

Organizations Supporting Media Education in the United States

In this country, those concerned with the relationship of education to the nonprint media have formed several national organizations. One such group is the National Association of Media Educators (NAME). Organized in 1972 as a confederation of twenty-five independent regional groups, in one year NAME had over 3,000 members.[6] Until recently, when lack of funding caused a suspension of services, a Washington, D.C.-based secretariat served as a communications link among the twenty-five groups as well as providing a monthly newsletter and organizational and teacher-training services.

The New England Screen Education Association (NESEA) is the NAME affiliate in the New England area. Formed in 1964, this organization has a current membership of over 400 educators from Maine to Rhode Island, and states as its purpose, ". . . to promote, foster and improve and develop all levels of media education both aural and visual as is or is to be found in the role of human communication. . . ."[7] According to NESEA records, approximately

---

[6]Interview with Charles McVinney, Executive Secretary, New England Screen Education Association, Concord, Massachusetts, June 11, 1973.

[7]New England Screen Education Association, Articles of Organization, p. 4.

170 schools in the New England area have active courses or curricula in media education.

Another organization which seeks to promote educational concern with the media is the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA). Founded in 1968 as the National Conference on Visual Literacy, the organization changed its name in 1975 to encourage international affiliations. The purpose of IVLA, as stated in its constitution, is:

> To promote a multidisciplinary forum for the exploration of modes of visual communication and their applications through the concept of visual literacy which is defined as a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences; . . .[8]

In general, then, it may be said that media education in the United States is an established area of study, supported by several organizations, and primarily concerned with aiding the individual to develop proficiency in the interpretation and utilization of nonprint communication, particularly the media of film, still photography, and television.

Objectives of Media Education

Up to this point, only a very general definition of media education has been offered; however, a more specific definition

---

[8]"By-laws of the International Visual Literacy Association," filed with the State of New York, 1973, Article II--Purpose.

will not be attempted. The media education movement has not developed to a point where strict parameters can be established, and it is likely that many practitioners would oppose such a move as delimiting rather than beneficial. What can be offered is the following series of remarks which should serve to illuminate the current general direction of media education as well as the diversity of its goals and objectives. It should be noted that while many of the following authors address themselves exclusively to the study of film, it would be a mistake not to apply many of their remarks to the other nonprint media.

> The child of the era of mass communications is still a child. It has never been wise for the educator to assume that the child newly come to school is an empty container to be filled in the classroom; today the child is overflowing with experience, impressions, attitudes. The formal process of education will continue to add new things, but it has the additional obligation of bringing order and perspective and selectivity to what is already present as well as to help the individual screen the constant flood of new stimuli which pour in from mass communication.[9]

Contained in the above is one of three major concerns guiding contemporary media education: that media education should provide the student with the skills and experiences necessary to deal with and benefit from the mass media. A second major concern is that media education provide the student with the skills and

---

[9] Mass Communications and Education, Educational Policies Commission (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1958), pp. 72-73.

experiences necessary to personally utilize forms of communication other than speech and print.

> Screen Education is a means of educating children and young people taking the screen language as much into account as does traditional education the English language. Thus, children need education in "reading" (seeing and hearing) this language at all stages--observing, understanding, appreciating films and television programs, in expressing their responses--discussing, writing, drawing, etc.; in "writing" the language (making films, television programs), and so on.[10]

A third concern, the newest and most rapidly growing at this time, is that media education provide the student with the skills and experiences that will aid him to become a sensitive, questioning, responsible human being.

> Screen Education implies the cultivation of an awareness, primarily of the visual, aural, and tactile perceptions necessary to understand how we see, hear, and feel as sensitive human beings. It is the development of an awareness of the psychological processes and social effects involved. Although Screen Education may embrace all visual media, it is primarily concerned with films and television.[11]

> . . . a film educator should teach children, rather than any particular subject matter or even the qualities of the medium itself. More precisely, a film educator should help children learn how to learn, how to respond sensitively and effectively to others, how to clarify their sense of who they are, and how to develop capacities to choose freely from a variety of alternatives. . . .

---

[10] A. W. Hodgkinson, "Screen Education: A Brief Statement of Its Philosophy and Practice" (unpublished paper).

[11] J. Hannigan and D. Powell, eds., The Waltham Conference: Screen Education in the United States, 1975, K-12 (Chicago: Films Incorporated, 1968), p. 3.

> . . . Film study, a promising beginning, is part of a widening movement toward sensitivity training in its broadest possible meaning; using and sharpening all the senses, acknowledging and dealing with feelings as well as ideas, and becoming increasingly open to possibilities in experiencing, learning, and growing.[12]

EVOLUTION OF MEDIA EDUCATION

While the concerns, concepts, and practice of media education, screen education, and visual literacy have evolved in the past fifteen years, there is a long-established educational foundation for their development. The objectives of media education, in terms of direction and spirit, are closely associated with the humanities education movement, particularly in the belief that education should be interdisciplinary and multisensory, engaging and developing in the learner as many modes of sensing, learning, and expressing as possible.

1900-1930

More specifically, educational concern with the media can be traced back to the early 1900s and the significant film study movement that existed in the United States during the 1930s. In the early 1900s, the growing popularity of the theatrical film produced widespread speculation as to the social and moral impli-

---

[12]Lacey, p. 2.

cations of this new medium. Educational consensus seemed to be that these films did have an adverse effect on the public, especially young people. Some educators, however, were torn between this negative view and the belief that the visual media could be a valuable educational tool.[13]

One early attempt to use the theatrical film for educational purposes is described in an article entitled "Making the Devil Useful."[14] Published in 1913, this article reports on one teacher's use of his students' interest in film by making popular films the source of material for written compositions. This article is particularly interesting in that its title reflects what seemed to be the contemporary view of film, and its content prophesies a major educational use of film that still exists today.

Between 1913 and 1930 various articles appeared in educational journals reporting on experiments relating education to film. The majority of these advocated either the use of film to stimulate writing or programs in film appreciation as a means of combating the adverse effects of film on youth.[15]

---

[13]Selby, pp. 47-59.

[14]Robert W. Neal, "Making the Devil Useful," The English Journal, II (December, 1913), 658-660.

[15]Selby, pp. 51-56.

1930-1940

The 1930s, however, witnessed a major increase in the number and kinds of film study programs found in American schools. Much of the impetus for this increase came negatively from the Payne Fund Studies, which indicated that the motion picture did have an effect on children and mainly an adverse effect; but positive gains were made through the work of people like William Lewin and Edgar Dale. Both Lewin and Dale were persuasive advocates for the necessity and educational value of studying film as a medium of communication in its own right--Lewin, through a series of film study guides called Photoplay Studies, which he edited for some twenty years, and Dale, through How to Appreciate Motion Pictures. By 1938, twenty thousand copies of How to Appreciate Motion Pictures had been distributed, making it the major textbook for classroom film study.[16]

Although there are no exact figures regarding the number of school systems teaching film appreciation during the 1930s, a 1941 article estimated that, in 1936, 345 teacher training institutions offered some exposure to the methods of teaching film.[17] Existing

---

[16]Ernest Dyer, "Training Film Taste in America," Sight and Sound, VII (Winter, 1938-39), 179.

[17]Kurt London, "The Motion Picture as a College Subject," The Educational Forum, V (January, 1941), 182.

records indicate that while the majority of film programs in the 1930s concentrated on the film's dramatic and literary aspects, an increasing number of educators were beginning to view the motion picture, as well as the other "mass media," as a viable area of study in itself. In 1939 the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) stated that the study of motion pictures and radio was an indispensable part of English programs.[18] In addition, growing criticism of the literary bias of film study and experimental programs seeking new relationships between education and the mass media began to foster an educational climate conducive to the growth of media education in American schools.

1940-1960

World War II, however, severely curtailed the media education movement. Almost overnight, attention was diverted from film and media study and refocused on the media as an instructional tool. In a society attempting to retrain thousands of individuals for new militaristic roles, there was little time to experiment with and develop the concept of media education. As a result, very little was done with media study in the schools from 1941-45.[19]

Unlike the instructional film and the audio-visual movement

---

[18]Selby, p. 113.

[19]Selby, p. 58.

which flourished during and after the war, the film and media study movement recovered very slowly. Active programs could still be found in scattered schools, but little remained of the strong 1939 movement. A 1959 survey by Arno Jewett for the United States Office of Education reported that, in 1956, 285 English courses in grades 7-12 had mass media education written into their curriculum. The majority, however, appeared to exist only on paper.[20] Advocates of media education did exist in the 1950s, but practitioners were difficult to find.

1960-Present

With the turn of the decade the supporters of media education grew in strength and with them came an increase in active media programs. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), which had continued to advocate media education during the war and throughout the fifties, found its advocacy supported in the late 1950s and early sixties by the National Education Association and the National Association of Independent Schools. Further support for media education came from the growth of groups catering specifically to the needs of media teachers. Groups such as The Chicago Center for Film Study and the Society for Education in Film

---

[20]Transcript of a tape recording of a conference, Wilmette, Illinois: Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, December 28-29, 1959, pp. 19-20, cited in Selby, pp. 141-142.

and Television in the United States (SEFTUS) were among the first. Others followed, including the National Association of Media Educators (NAME) and the International Visual Literacy Association mentioned earlier.

From the early sixties to the present there has been a continuous increase both in the number of organizations supporting the concept of media education and the growth of media programs within the schools. Media education today may not be a widespread as its advocates would like it to be, but it does seem to be a viable area of educational concern, supported and served by an increasing number of organizations and attracting a growing body of advocates and practitioners.